

MOUNT HOLYOKE

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Phone 413-538-2080/Fax 413-538-2081

Using AlumNet

What is AlumNet?

AlumNet, available in the Career Development Center Library, is a directory of alumnae who have volunteered to provide information about their careers and advice about the job or internship search in that field. AlumNet is a resource to help you advance your understanding of the opportunities available and the requirements for entering a certain profession. Occasionally, the alumnae may be able to offer contacts to specific internship and job openings; but remember that the alumnae have agreed to share information only. However, they can be asked for suggestions on how and where to look for jobs and internships in their fields and geographical areas, for the best strategies to gain direct experience in their fields, and for referrals and contacts to other professionals. To use AlumNet correctly and effectively, focus on a particular field, organization, or geographical area. You should write to the alumnae stating specific requests, submit a resume, and then follow up with a telephone call.

Before You Use AlumNet:

Do as much research on your field of interest as you can before calling or writing the alumna. You must show the alumna you are serious and that you have devoted some time to gaining a better understanding of the field. Nothing will disconcert an alumna more than receiving a query like, "I think I am interested in consulting. What is consulting?" Make sure you have checked out available resources at the CDC Library and from relevant professional associations, perused WebExchange on the CDC website, and thought carefully about how this field would fit your interests and strengths. Then, you will be ready to capitalize on an alumna's "insider information."

How to Contact an Alumna:

- a. Requesting an appointment with an alumna requires following general rules of etiquette. One formal approach is to send a letter or an email stating why you are writing, how you heard of her, what is it that interests you, and asking for the opportunity to talk with her to learn more about her field. It is also acceptable to call the person first in order to ascertain if they would be willing to talk with you or if they would be a good resource. However, this more informal approach is better in circumstances in which you know the person or have a personal connection with them.
- b. When you write to an alumna, remember that your letter represents both you and Mount Holyoke College. Moreover, alumnae receive similar letters not only from other MHC students but also from students at many colleges who know the value of networks and have unearthed many contacts. Your letter, therefore, must be an example of your finest writing style, without any typographical or grammatical errors, logical in presentation, and concise in content. The best-written letters always receive favorable attention. Those that are carelessly prepared, in contrast, result in critical feedback to the Career Development Center.
- c. Remember that the alumna may have a very busy schedule, therefore in your initial contact, you should expect to make an appointment to speak in length at a later point. The alumna wants to help, but she may just need to set aside time to talk with you. In your first letter or telephone call, suggest that you would like to set up a time that will be convenient for her. You may end up talking with her at length on your first call, if the alumna happens to be free; but it is more polite to not be presumptuous.
- d. Always leave your phone number when leaving a message for an alumna. If you have an answering machine, be sure your message is professional.

- e. When you call to set up an in-person visit, do not hesitate to clarify appropriate attire, as well as, confirm directions and parking availability.

Guidelines for the Interview:

- a. Be aware of the time constraints of your contact. You should go into your interview with the intention of using between 15-30 minutes of the alumna's time, unless you have made prior arrangements for a longer meeting, such as a lunch.
- b. Prepare a concise opening statement that will pave the way for a lively conversation. State that you already know what kind of help you are seeking so the conversation will be focused and well used. You will have done research on your contact's company and industry before the interview, so you should have some thoughtful questions to assist you with your career exploration or job search. (See page 3 for Potential Questions.)
- c. Present yourself in a professional manner. You should be presentable, dress in business attire, and listen well.
- d. The alumna may ask to see your resume. If you are engaged in a serious job search, you should always have a polished resume to present. This way, your alumna-mentor will know that you are worth investing time and energy in helping. If you need help with a letter or a resume, come to one of the CDC workshops on either subject or schedule a critique with a CDC counselor.
- e. Networking interviews are not job interviews. Networking is not directly the means to a job. It provides you with knowledge about the job, the field, the qualities and qualifications the job requires, and advice for your job search. It is important to remember that if you interview someone under the guise that you want information, but really you are hoping to get a job from her or through her, that will be apparent. Informational interviewing is like doing extra reading outside the syllabus for a paper; it won't guarantee you an A+, but you will be better prepared and more informed in your assignment. The bonus is that often, if your contact remembers you or is impressed by you, she will refer you or recommend you when a job comes up in their company.

After the Interview:

- a. Always send a thank you letter to the alumna within 2-3 days after your visit. Share what parts of your visit you enjoyed and what advice you found particularly helpful. Let her know what you plan to do with the information you received. For example, if the alumna gave you the name of a colleague to contact, then you might add that you have sent the person a letter. Make sure your letter is well written: no typos, misspellings, or grammatical errors. This letter is very important, as it will leave the alumna with a positive impression of you.
- b. It is often wise to keep a record of your contacts. Take a stack of 3x5 cards and write down each contact's name, company, and a record of your communication with them. Here is an example:

Sandra Johnson, CitiCorp

Initial letter—sent 1/12/2002

Called for interview—1/19/2002—had 15 min conversation, introduction

Interview—1/24/2002—gave me colleague's contact information

Thank you letter—sent 1/26/2002

Message from her on machines about job with American Express—another contact name, 2/15/2002

Letter updating her on my contact with American Express and appreciation, sent 3/1/2002

- c. Finally, write again in the following month or two and let them know how their advice helped you and where you are in your job search.

For More Information:

AlumNet is available for search and perusal in the CDC Library, where you can also find informative books on informational interviewing and networking. If you would like the CDC to run a search for you for a \$5 fee, you can fill out an AlumNet Request Form, available in the CDC lobby handouts section and on the CDC web site. Should you have additional questions regarding this process, please drop by the Career Development Center and talk to one of the peer counselors or the career counselors.

Potential Questions for an Informational Interview with an Alumna

Job and Career Questions

- What are the duties/responsibilities of this job? What is a typical day or week?
- What knowledge, skills, abilities, and other qualifications are desirable for this job?
- What do you view as the critical skills for a position in this field?
- What are the rewards derived from working in this field/job? What are the frustrations and drawbacks?
- What are typical salary ranges for someone doing this type of work?
- What does it take to be successful in this field?

Career Future Questions

- What is the typical pattern of career development in this field?
- What is the future outlook in this field? Is it growing, declining or holding steady?

Lifestyle Questions

- What obligations does your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary workweek?
- What are your working hours and travel schedule like?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, schedule, vacation, etc.?

Career Preparation Advice

- How did Mount Holyoke prepare you for this work?
- What kind of background is necessary to enter this field?
- How can I acquire the required skills? Are there courses or experiences, paid or otherwise, which you would recommend?
- Is a graduate degree recommended? If so, are there specific programs that are valued in this field?
- What are the books and periodicals I should be reading to understand the field? Do you have regular reading you find useful?

Job Search Advice

- How can I find a summer or full-time job related to this field?
- What types of employers hire people in this line of work?
- How could I overcome a potential employer's objections to me?
- How can I identify both advertised and unadvertised vacancies?
- What is the best way to approach perspective employers? Best timing?
- Any advice on developing new job leads?

Resume Review Questions

- Is this an appropriate resume for the jobs I will be seeking? What about the length and format?
- If an employer received this resume, how do you think she or he would react to it?
- How might I best improve the format and content of the resume?

Asking for Referrals

- Do you know any other people doing this type of work (or related work) who might be willing to talk with me, as you have?

Sample Contact Letter to Alumna

Mount Holyoke College
1837 Blanchard Student Center
South Hadley, MA 01075
October 20, 2002

If you are sending an email instead of a letter, you may omit the address headings and the date.

Ms. Jomeka Styles
Northeast Regional Coordinator
League of Women Voters
1000 M Street NW, Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Ms. Styles:

I found your contact information through the AlumNet at Mount Holyoke College. Over the past two years, I have developed a passion for social activism, specifically in promoting greater citizen participation in democratic government through education. I have worked with my Town Hall and in a local law firm in the past, and I am currently seeking a related internship in order to gain more insight and experience in this arena. I would like to learn more about the work you do with the League of Women Voters and to seek your advice about preparing for a career with a focus on social activism.

I am a sophomore at Mount Holyoke College majoring in politics and minoring in psychology. Aside from thoroughly engaging in the politics curriculum, I have also been active in the Student Government Association (SGA) as a residence hall representative. In this microcosm of the "real world," I have worked to inform and educate my fellow hall residents about student government issues, as well as listened to and advocated for their needs to the Student Senate. One of the controversial issues last year centered upon whether SGA should provide funding for MassPIRG, and the fierce debates culminated in a campus-wide vote. I expended great efforts in encouraging my peers to learn about the issue and cast their votes. The satisfaction and enjoyment I gained from this challenge have affirmed my interest in pursuing this type of profession.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity for a phone conversation with you concerning careers in grassroots organizations that lobby for just and effective democratic government. Next week I will call to schedule a time that is convenient for you. Thank you for offering to give career advice to Mount Holyoke students.

Sincerely,

Mary Lyon

Sample Thank You Letter to Alumna

Mount Holyoke College
1837 Blanchard Student Center
South Hadley, MA 01075
November 4, 2002

Ms. Jomeka Styles
Northeast Regional Coordinator
League of Women Voters
1000 M Street NW, Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Ms. Styles:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me on November 1st. I feel grateful to have had the opportunity to discuss my plans to establish a career in politics and social activism with you. Your advice about preparations for this career was very helpful, and I gained a better understanding of this field of work from the perspectives you offered. I will send Eddie Beyer my resume as you suggested. The January internship with the Rock the Vote Campaign sounds like an amazing opportunity.

I will contact you again to let you know if this January internship works out. If you hear of other prospects before then or have additional advice for me, please give me a call. Thank you, once again, for all of your help.

Sincerely,

Mary Lyon